A MARKETING PUBLICATION OF LIPPINCOTT & MARGULIES/NUMBER 34

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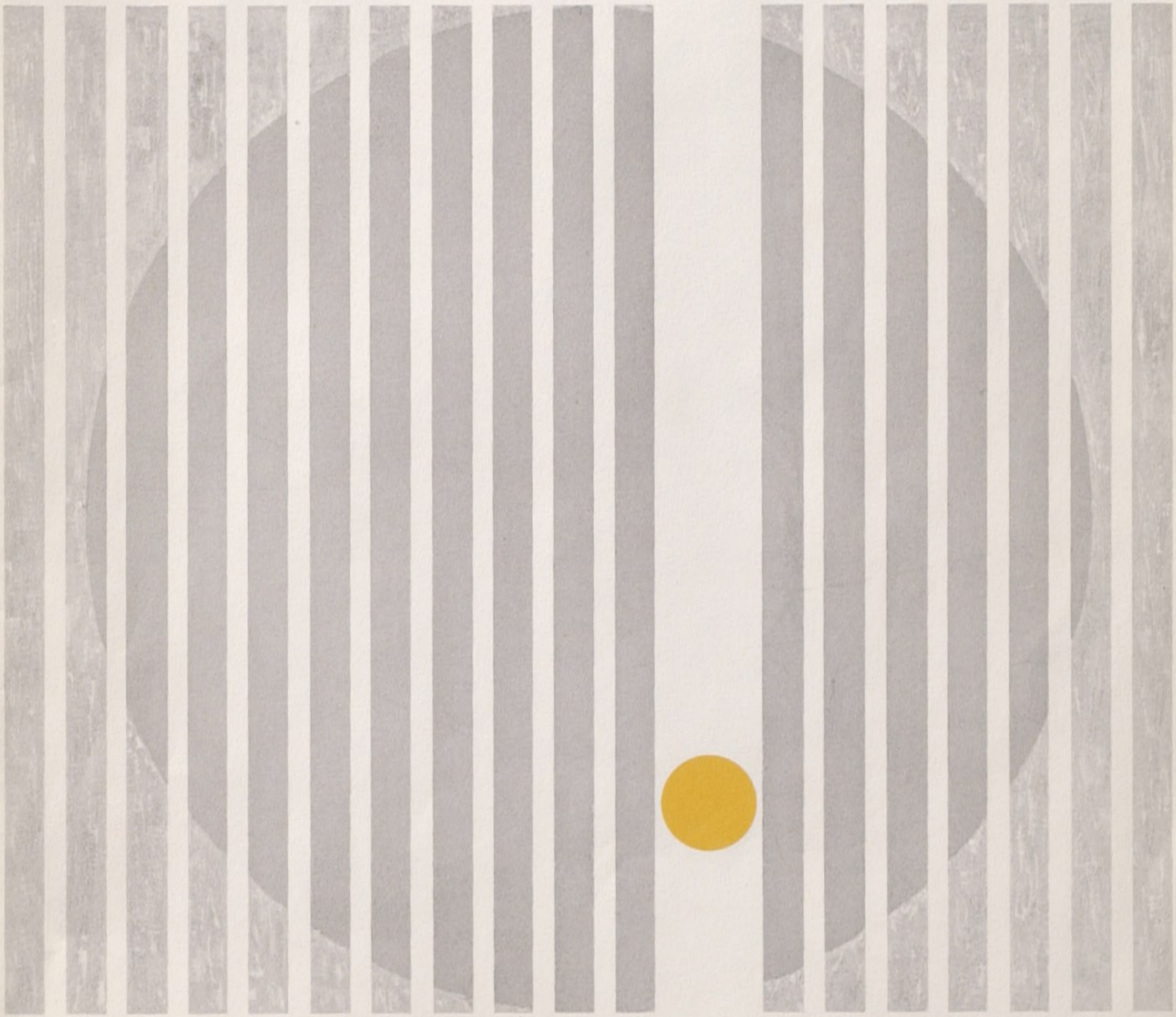

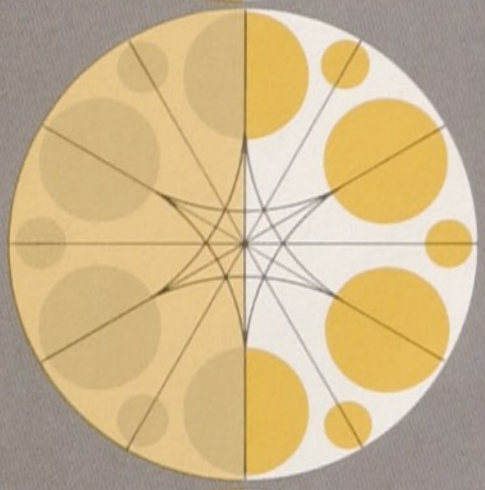

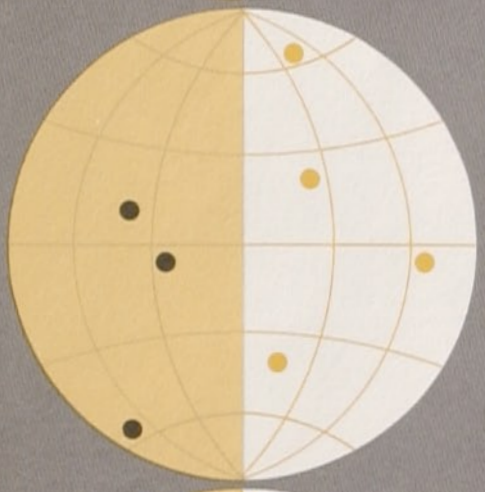

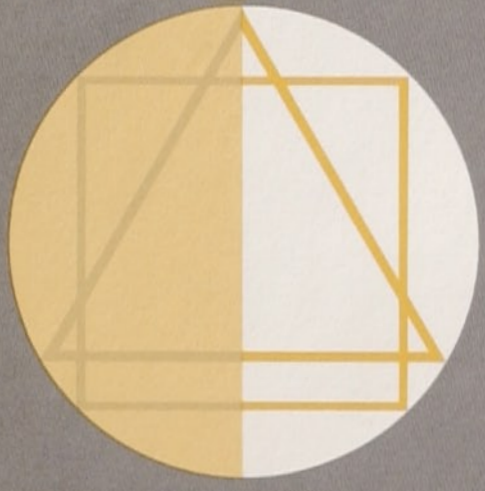

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Creativity:
Buzz Word or Skillful Art? 2
How does the industrial designer respond to creative tensions while being guided by marketing disciplines?

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Like night and day, dogmas disappear. And then they reappear. Color, like time and history, must be viewed in its right context.

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Patriotism doesn't always pay, but a product without a country might.

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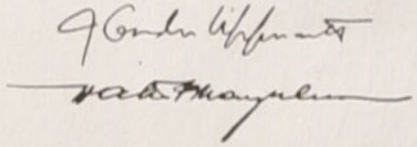
No final definitive answer. Only a method for clarifying the problem and mapping the solution. Plus one thing: Creative guts.

Business is still a game of skill *and* chance. No matter how much planning is done, outside factors can suddenly and surprisingly influence a venture's outcome for good or for bad. But this does not mean that planning's effectiveness is in any way being called into doubt. On the contrary, life's surprises (the jolts that can send you *up* as well as down) are all the more a sound reason for the uses of planning. And this is where the skills of marketing come in.

In this issue of Design Sense we treat four areas of business life in which the range for skill and chance is especially broad and deep. These are the areas of *Creativity*, *Color*, *International Naming*, and *Symbolism*.

These are high risk areas. Creative intuition, whose springs are gathered in the deep wells of experience and instinct, must play a fundamental role in all of them. About this there is no doubt. However, as much as this may be our point in the following four articles, it is by no means our only point.

Of equal importance is the stress we give to the skills of marketing. Man and the events of his life are, after all and to a very significant degree, amenable to rational interpretation and analysis. This discipline, for business and industry, we call marketing. But marketing is not by any means a finalist dogma. It is a method. It is a method, of great and viable flexibility, by which disciplined and rational skills are brought to bear upon problems and opportunities. When combined, creativity and marketing sharpen the *skills* that are required, while greatly diminishing the *chances* that are inevitable, in the conduct of business.



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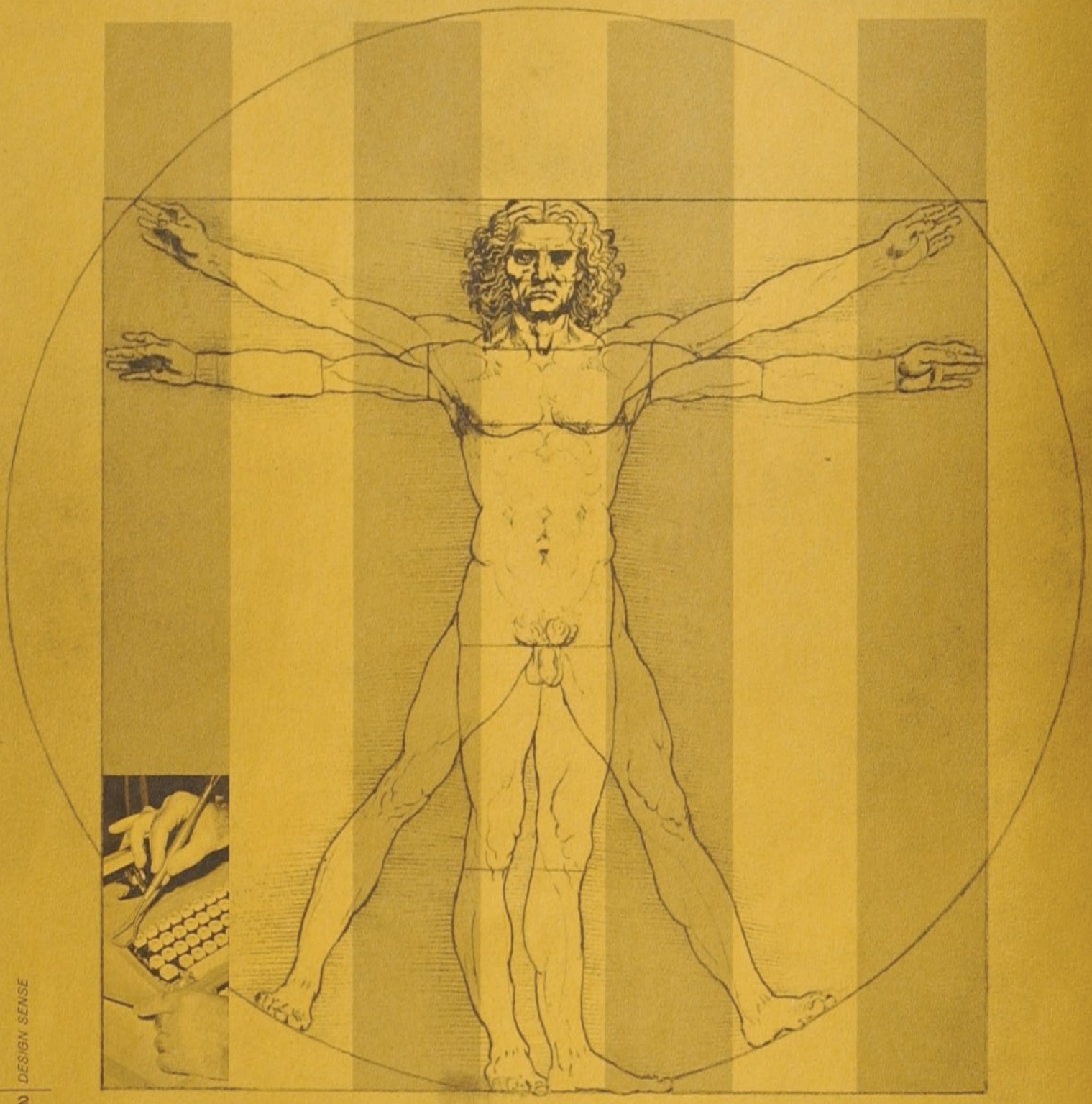
CREATIVITY: BUZZ WORD OR SKILLFUL ART?



Creativity is the single most overworked word in the communications business. It is probably the most remarkably misinterpreted, misunderstood and misused word attempting to describe a vast range of human activities. It is also, despite its multiple literary, philosophical and artistic definitions, a concept so broad that it deserves a fresh look whenever it is applied to a specific activity or effort.

All right then, what does creativity mean to the industrial designer?

When the various members of the Lippincott & Margulies design, marketing, research and account management teams were asked this question, the result was a large stack of memos replete with a range of imaginative definitions, colorful anecdotes and probing thoughts. However, regardless of the wording used by individual executives, the consensus boiled down to this:

Lippincott & Margulies is concerned with "effective creativity." There is no purpose to creativity in a vacuum. The purpose of creating something is communication.

Communication, of course, is the purpose of *all* creative activity. Writers, artists, composers — all have something to say, and the measure of their creative contribution is the degree of effectiveness of their communication. A Shakespeare sonnet or a Mozart sonata endures because the originator was and is effective in his communication. He has something to say and he says it effectively.

DESIGN FOR SALES

Of course, the industrial designer (as a consulting firm in business to perform a service for clients) is not precisely in the same position as the pure artist. The latter creates to express himself. If he communicates effectively, he becomes a success and his work may even endure. The industrial designer, on the other hand, offers his creative services on the basis of increased profitability to his client.

In brief, the industrial designer does not seek "creativity" for his or its own sake, but tries to produce effective (sales-making) communications for his client that are the result of "effective creativity." To put it colloquially, this means that, "Awards are nice, but sales are better!" In other words, the entire creative effort is channeled and disciplined by the designer's objectives, which must coincide with the objectives of the client: *The successful, that is, profitable sale of the client's products or services.*

It means also that today's industrial designer, in order to be sucessful on behalf of his clients in the intensely competitive marketplace, requires all of the sharpest and most up-to-date tools to aid him in his creative effort. These tools, in brief, are:

SOUND MARKETING THINKING—
For best results in industrial design, marketing must be a merging of the best thinking of the client with that of the consulting firm itself. It is this teamwork, enhanced by professional analysis and experience, that can add a new perspective to the client's problem and bring a fresh solution into focus.

Creativity, of course, is not restricted to art or design explorations. There is the opportunity for creativity in thought which, in the commercial world, may be expressed in an original and exciting marketing concept or in a new understanding of an unfulfilled consumer need.

It is this jointly evolving marketing platform, with contributions from both the client and the consultant, that provides the initial guidelines, the all-important design platform, for the creative design team.

SKILLED RESEARCH TECHNIQUES—
These provide the means for checking out and verifying the marketing concepts and potential creative solutions—from choices of corporate or brand names to package designs, new product models or corporate identification systems.

Research does not offer creative solutions. But creative conception and interpretation of research can provide the design team with invaluable guidance.

BROAD SCOPE OF CREATIVE TALENT—
Here the proverbial cat bounces back on its four feet. Just what is this creative talent that is needed if the designer's work is to have that spark of success?

It is many things:

1. The instinctive ability to view a problem from a fresh and broad perspective.
2. The self-assurance necessary either to defy convention or comply with it, depending upon the requirements of the problem.
3. The experience to evaluate what is basic and what is unessential.
4. The judgment needed to choose between various closely related alternatives.
5. The good taste, in large part innate, which makes it possible to be excitingly different without being offensive.

And, where effective communications are concerned, creativity in industrial design and marketing also presupposes the ability to disagree and to persuade. For it is strange, but true, that creativity thrives in conflict as much as it does in harmony. After all, isn't that what creativity ultimately does? It gives rise to unity out of chaos; it affords resolution to dilemma.

COLOR: THE FORMULA THAT DOESN'T WORK

One shade of a color makes your product flop, while another shade helps it break sales records. There are male and female colors. Colors change in value as "persuaders" when they are associated with diverse products.

In fact, color is so powerful as either a dissuader or a persuader – or, if you will, as a salesman – that the Lippincott & Margulies creative teams have long considered color as one of the most dynamic, everchanging and vital creative tools in commercial communications.

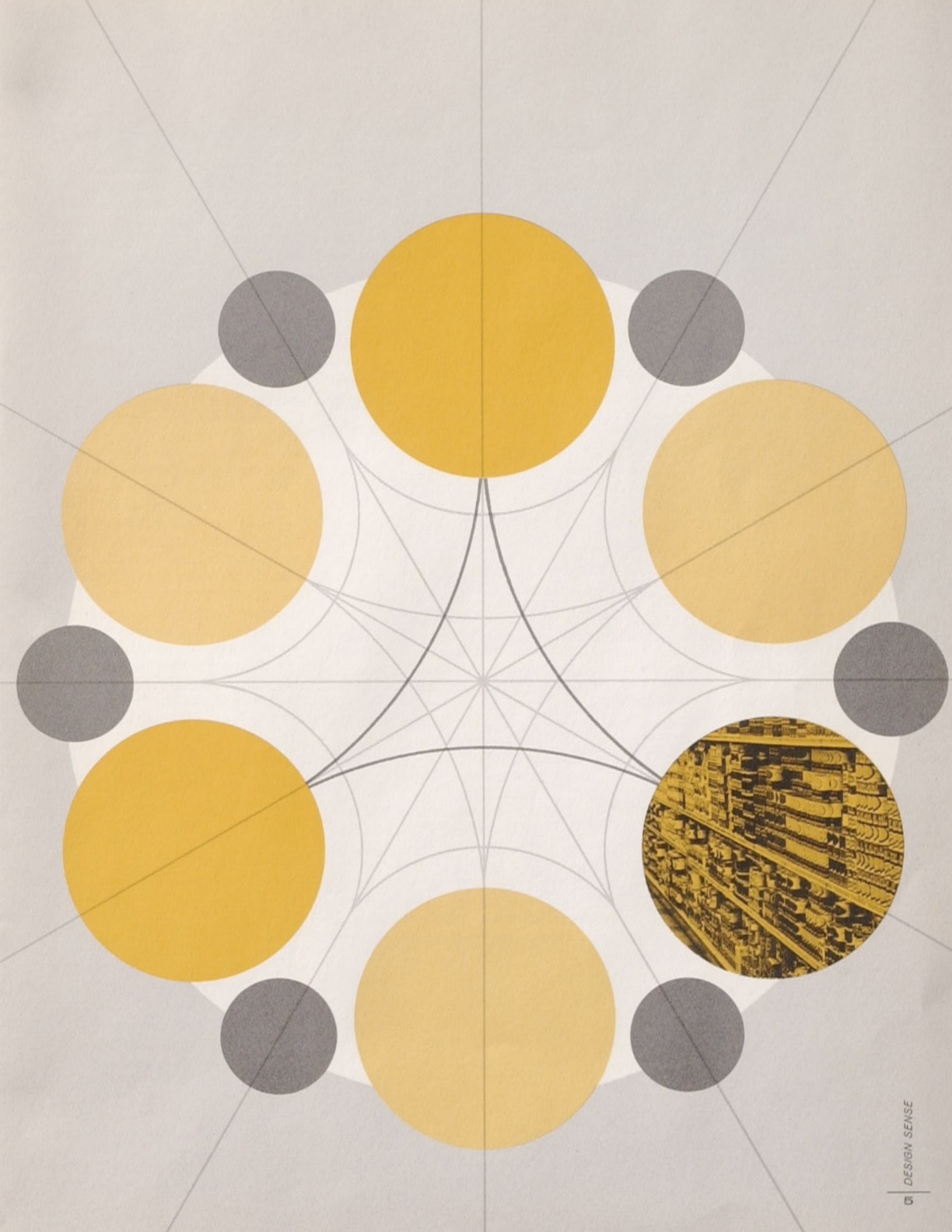
Take the case of the shade of blue which could have made the difference between success and failure for one major consumer product: the Montclair cigarette. When Lippincott & Margulies originally tested the earliest version of the final Montclair package in competition with other candidate packages, the playback for the cigarette from consumers, influenced by the deep blue shade, was: strong tobacco, masculine-appeal cigarette. In order to broaden the male-female appeal and stress the menthol content as against sheer tobacco flavor of the cigarette, the Lippincott & Margulies creative team lightened and brightened the blue of the package– with the desired results. (For the complete Montclair story, see Design Sense # 33.)

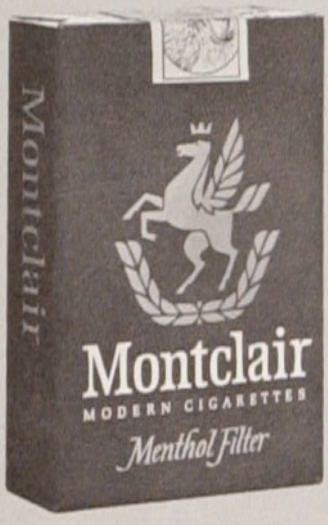
COLOR AND COMPETITION

Just what effect does color have on the buying public? And what should you, the manufacturer of products, know about color in order to use it to your own competitive advantages?

Lippincott & Margulies design and research teams have long considered color to be a very important factor in positioning a product and in selling it. The creative use of color for this purpose becomes thwarted only when generalizing and formula thinking take the place of original effort.

Color selection, like any other area of creativity, requires original exploration in context with specific products and situations rather than application of formulas by rote.





Choice of color is a truly creative problem with research as a backstop to double-check on intuition and to guide the creative process.

Certainly a number of basic facts about color are accepted knowledge. For example, it is quite true that certain shades of blue tend to appeal to women. But that doesn't mean that red doesn't appeal to them. Nor does it mean that blue will appeal to them on all products and in all circumstances.

SHADES OF MEANING

Here then are some of the basic reasons why color choice is a function of creativity rather than an automatic or doctrinaire process:

1. *COLOR HAS A DIFFERENT MEANING IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS.* It projects a different image when associated with different products. Thus a color that may be eminently successful for one product could be the reason for another product's failure. It isn't difficult to find examples to illustrate the basic point: Yellow, for instance, may be excellent as the dominant color for a butter cookie package. But perhaps it might connote the wrong characteristics for a menthol cigarette.

Of course, this does not mean that a manufacturer should blindly follow the color traditions in his particular field. And, it is entirely possible, just to prove the contradictions inherent in a creative choice of color, that at some time in the competitive picture, the use of yellow for a new menthol cigarette could give the product a uniqueness and sales advantage that would make the color choice look like a stroke of genius.

Indeed, there are times when the very break with the pattern will help to assure success. But, when breaking a pattern, it is important that the color chosen is in context with the product and its market goals. Thus the Montclair cigarette, for example, breaks with the cliche of green for menthol, but stays within the family of "cool" colors.

CHANGE IS EFFECTIVE

A classic example out of the Lippincott & Margulies annals was this firm's break with the beer color tradition in the early Fifties. At the time, all beer labels were predominantly red. But beer was getting lighter and the appetite- or thirst-appeals stressed were its "wetness" and refreshing qualities.

Lippincott & Margulies explored a variety of colors and decided upon blue for Hamm's Beer. This was certainly as drastic a departure from the color tradition of the product category as there could be at the time. But the color choice was very successful, becoming the keynote of the entire promotional effort, and it sparked the "land of the sky-blue waters" theme.

Subsequently, Lippincott & Margulies used blue with equal success on Goetz and Piel's. The latter recently changed in its campaign to appeal to more habitual beer drinkers. (For a discussion of the importance of targeting the heavy users of your product, read "Think Concentrated," in Design Sense #32.)

But product and product category is certainly not the only context in which a color candidate must be evaluated. There is the broader context of the supermarket shelf or display space. Certainly the manufacturer's great need to stand out and create impact on the laden and highly competitive mass display shelves imposes another burden upon the designer. He must design and chose color for shelf impact, without losing the tasteful qualities essential in a product for home use.

What good is display impact if the product jars the user's sensibilities in normal home use of the product and thus interferes with re-use or repeat purchase?

In mass display, of course, color is a key factor in identification. It is often the primary element for defining a product's section. For example, "This is Campbell" is an instantaneous consumer reaction to colors and their use in distinctive combinations. Therefore, rapid recognition could be impaired by use of a color that has suddenly shown up on too many packages and products.

2. *COLOR SHOWS UP DIFFERENTLY ON DIFFERENT PACKAGING MATERIALS.* Therefore, all color exploration must be carried on in context with the packaging material to be used, or the material that the color is to be applied to—be it glass, plastic, paper or boxboard.

This problem is becoming increasingly complex as more and more different types of materials are being made available to the packaging industry. The current trend, for instance, seems to be toward use of foils, fluorescents and metalized plastics in the attempt to attract attention and get out of the confines of the color palette. Furthermore, many ink companies today are developing fluorescent inks for mass display to satisfy the manufacturer's desire for attention and impact.

CAREFUL DOES IT

However, these innovations are not necessarily an unmixed blessing. While some may be useful on certain products, they can connote totally wrong impressions for other products. And many of these innovations are still priced very high.

It is natural that the search for new impact should continue. After all, in texture and form the designer

can find infinite and endless variations. But the color palette is finite. On the whole, Lippincott & Margulies designers have found that it is not necessary nor even desirable in many instances to reach for the "far out" in order to achieve distinction.

3. *COLOR TASTES, TRENDS AND STYLES ARE SUBJECT TO RAPID AND CYCLICAL CHANGES.* Not only does the designer have to contend with and second-guess these changes, but he must also anticipate "color fatigue." Color fatigue, an eternal factor in the fashion and decorating fields, has a powerful impact in package design as well. Nor does it necessarily take place in direct proportion to the oddity of the color that is temporarily fashionable or to a calculable amount of the use of a color.

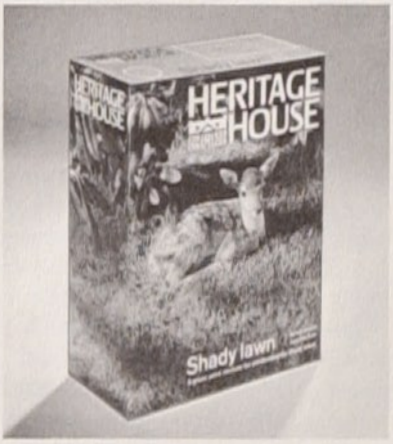
In brief, there is no formula or rule about color fashions or about the fatigue factor. Take the extremely volatile fashion field as an example. Pink was an outstandingly big color in 1960, and yet, despite its overwhelming popularity at that time and its resultant over-use in women's clothes, pink has remained popular to this day and has even enjoyed a renewed spurt of interest in 1963.

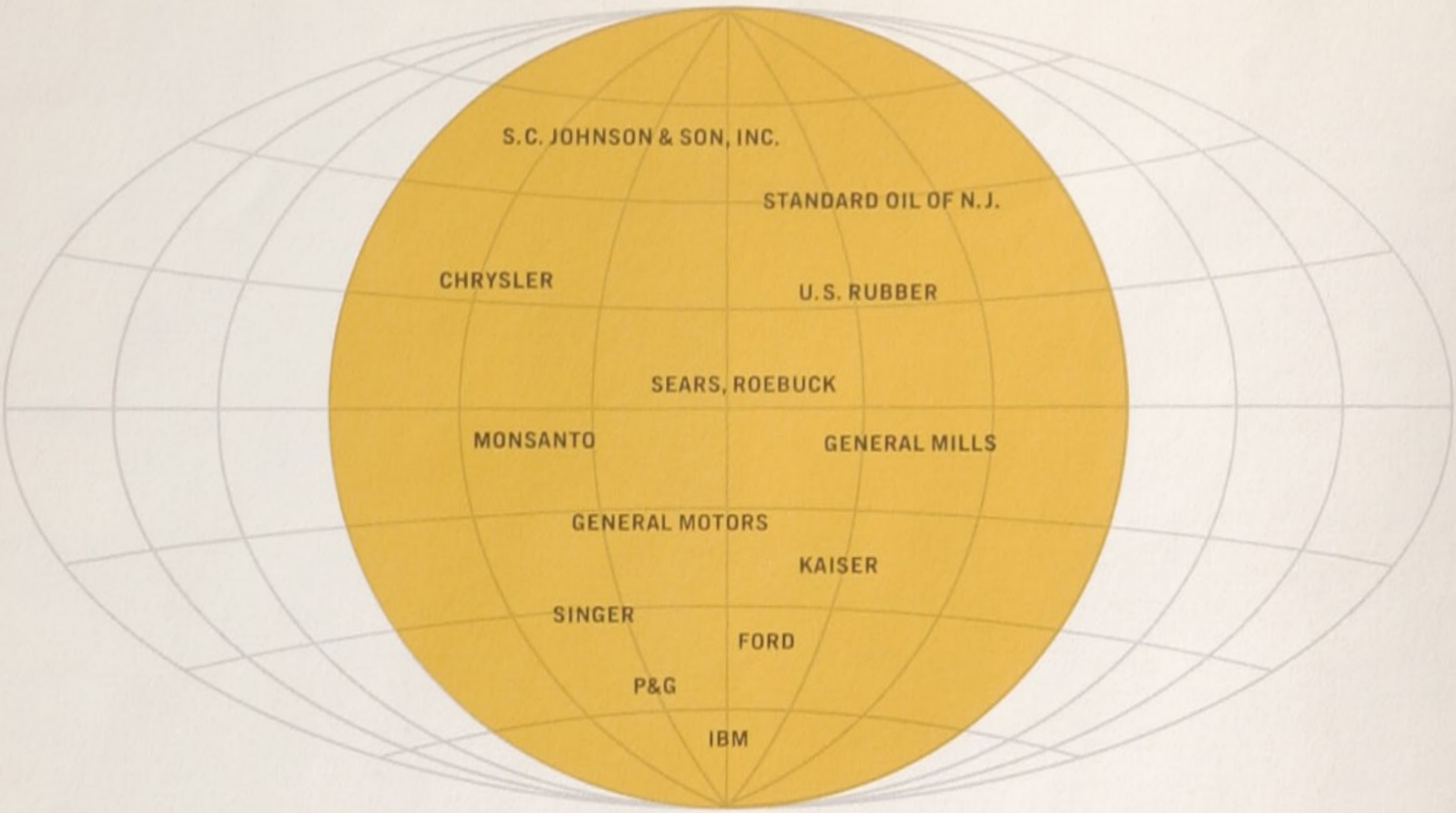
PUT PROBLEM IN CONTEXT

How do these styles and cycles in color affect products and packaging?

They affect it to the extent that all generalization must be considered invalid and all "of course" associations of products with specific colors must be carefully re-evaluated and frequently shunned. In other words, the good designer, aware of the trends, must take a fresh look at each color problem in context with the entire field, the display factors, the product category and the product itself.

There is neither hide-bound rule nor magic formula which can insure successful color choice. There is simply the combination of creative exploration backed up with research to provide guidelines. Intuition and marketing have to work hand-in-hand in this field as they do in all other areas of commercial creativity, to make sure that the product achieves the impact and sales results that it should have.





THE NAME: FIRST STEP IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Today more than 3,300 U.S. corporations have either a manufacturing base or some form of direct financial interest in at least one foreign country. A number of the giant leaders in the international field – Ford, Singer, Chrysler, IBM, General Motors, Kaiser, Corn Products, P&G, Sears, Roebuck – operate in many non-U.S. markets, several on all five continents.

But does this mean that American business leaders have become truly international?

It does not. U.S. direct investment abroad during the past decade has zoomed up to nearly $37 billion, tripling the $12-billion base that had been laid down by 1950. Yet management, with some outstanding exceptions, of course, still finds it difficult to achieve a world viewpoint in making its international marketing decisions.

Not unlike the world of international diplomacy, the business world seems to suffer most acutely from its communications problems. Once the U.S. corporation reaches outside the boundaries of its own domestic market, possibly the most obvious symptom of this communications block is *the naming of its overseas affiliates and divisions.*

THERE ARE GUIDELINES

From its work with a number of international corporations, Names, Inc., an affiliate of Lippincott & Margulies, has charted a few guidelines about this worrisome process of naming overseas affiliates.

The use of a geographic designator for the overseas affiliate is one of the most common of practices – *and one of the naming approaches that backfires most frequently!* Therefore, in this first discussion of international name finding, Names, Inc. will consider the elements of this particular approach to naming affiliates.

• *Need to differentiate affiliate from parent company or from other domestic affiliates.* This seems to be one of the first reasons companies cite for calling their affiliate "Parent-Company-Name England, Ltd.," for example, or "Parent-Company-Name of Italy, S.A."

However, this need for differentiation is an internal need, not a need of the public with whom the firm is

dealing. The European public, for example, knows it is dealing with the firm located abroad simply from the address. Therefore, this internal communications problem could certainly be resolved through a naming or coding other than the attachment of the geographic designator on all official communications.

• *Value of capitalizing on the equity of the parent company name and transferring it abroad.* On the surface, this is an excellent reason for using the parent company name overseas, particularly in view of the international prestige and impact which major U.S.-headquartered corporations frequently have.

NAMES AND OWNERS

But when the parent company owns 50% or less of the overseas affiliate, this naming practice can be dangerous. When a corporation does have the control, it can do it somewhat safely from a legal viewpoint, but it should be careful not to make the affiliate sound like an appendage, but rather like a central part of the firm.

The danger of using the parent company name for affiliates that are not controlled by the parent becomes apparent if a change in affiliate policy or ownership suddenly makes a change of name desirable or imperative. After all, withdrawing the parent company name after the fact is always a negative communication.

• *Giving the overseas public a feeling of local flavor and of "belonging."* This highly worthwhile public relations objective is thoroughly defeated by use of the geographic designator. Research shows that when Frenchmen or Englishmen, for example, are confronted with such names as "Societé XYZ Francaise," or "ABC Company of England" they sense immediately that the home office is outside their own country.

Incidentally, without knowing where such a firm is headquartered, people will usually guess England, Switzerland, U.S., or Germany. If inhabitants of these listed countries make a guess, they too will choose one of the countries (England, Switzerland, U.S., or Germany) but not their own.

• *Projecting the proud American heritage of technical know-how and product quality.* These are often primary reasons for transferring the well-established and U.S.-identified American parent company name overseas.

MORE TO CONSIDER

There are, however, some negative sides to this statement too. For example, while American products are indeed well-respected, the nationals of most countries don't much like the dollar out-flow of their country. Of course, the sophisticated customers will always know whether the affiliate is linked to an American parent company or not. So a basically American corporation can't really hide this fact.

The American prestige should really function on a product and selected-customer basis, such as Kodak in Germany. In Latin America, certain appliances are considered best when they're American; others, if they're German. It might be well to know which product a company is marketing before making a name decision in a Latin American country.

These facts about the geographic designator and that it is a dead giveaway of a non-local company may not be too familiar to American business management. After all, U.S. corporations themselves use "American" and "U.S." more than any other country in naming themselves. However, provincialism is no excuse for poor business judgment.

IS THIS SYMBOL REALLY NECESSARY?

Finding a creative solution to a corporate identity or even a trademark problem is infinitely more complex than the design of the symbol.

Some corporate or product problems may lend themselves to a logotype or signature and bypass the need for a separate symbol altogether.

Furthermore, changing the symbol on a package may indeed evoke a totally different (that is, negative) consumer reaction—not because of the effect of the symbol alone, but because the whole package configuration is changed.

Symbols interact with other communications components like a chemical compound, not a chemical mixture: The whole assembly of factors may be greater or lesser in impact than any individual part. It is rarely equal to their sum.

What do these conclusions mean to the corporation seeking a new identification or trademark?

Management should seek creative and knowledgeable help in solving such problems. Artistic virtuosity, used in a vacuum where understanding of marketing needs and problems are concerned, can be as harmful as a pedestrian and unimaginative approach to a design exploration.

WHICH BOOTMAKER?

In the case of symbols, the need for creativity becomes apparent in a brief nutshell history of symbols. The earliest commercial symbols were used by craftsmen (such as guild members in the Middle Ages) as a guarantee of authenticity. For instance, Paul Revere used his mark on his silver in the 18th Century.

In Europe, symbols made their first widespread appearance earlier during the mercantile revolution. In any small hamlet, the local shoemaker advertised his shop by hanging out the sign of a boot; the optician, a pair of oversize glasses; the fish vendor, the sign of a fish. But with the growth of cities, how could one bootmaker differentiate himself from competitors?

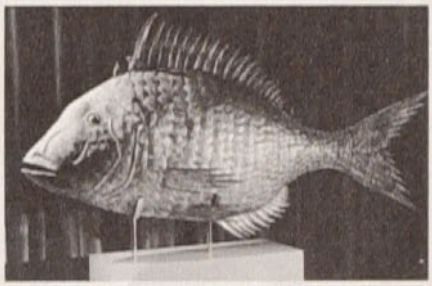
It therefore became essential to make symbolic communications more versatile. A symbol had to be specific, clear and appropriate. It also had to do something other than identify; it had to characterize. In other words, the symbol had to project qualities and characteristics of the store, product or company represented.

All of the aggregate egos of mankind throughout history have been concerned with this problem of symbolic identification. There are, for instance, few sets of rules more complete than those covering the heraldic devices used on British coats-of-arms. Yet these are after all simply "trademarks" for families.

CORPORATE IDENTIFIER

Today, corporate identifications can be classified as four basic types: the *logotype*, which may be free-standing or contained in a shape; *initials*, free-standing or in a shape; *realistic* design; or, *abstract* design. Of course, the designer is free to depart from these basic forms and vary them by combining them. For instance, the corporate mark which Lippincott & Margulies designed for Weyerhaeuser is a combination of the *abstract*, a triangle, and the *realistic*, a tree.

One danger for the corporation seeking a new identity lies in a tendency to underestimate the amount of time necessary to register a symbol



in the public's mind. Indeed, the ability to register any kind of identification depends upon what Lippincott & Margulies calls the "time-use" factor, or sustained exposure. In brief, the number of years that a mark is used and the variety, scope and consistency of its uses from all media to signage, from lapel buttons to brochures and in all other elements of visual communication, will dictate the degree and depth of impact.

It is conceivable that a company could own a trademark for a long time, but not enjoy recognition for it commensurate with its history because it has not used this trademark widely. Thus it becomes apparent that the introduction of a new symbol could very well become frustrating, if the whole program is not thoroughly implemented.

There is also a relationship between the degree of uniqueness a corporation might achieve by going abstract and the amount of effort that it wants to employ to promote its new symbol. In other words, under some conditions, it may well be a smarter move to develop a logotype which people can read so that penetration can be more rapid.

Several companies, for instance, have been successful with logotypes. This use consists of the name of the company or brand lettered in a fashion that is both unique and readable. This is an ideal approach for a company in which extensive promotion of an abstract symbol is not practical.

SPECIAL REASONS CITED

However, such considerations are not the only reason for deciding in favor of logotype rather than the use of a symbol. Indeed, the reasons for such a choice should be founded upon a good analysis and understanding of the corporate and product marketing needs and problems, the competitive picture, and all the overall corporate objectives.

There are, of course, certain names that in themselves have trademark connotations, such as Kleenex, IBM, Kodak, or Xerox. The last is such a unique configuration of letters, embodying a unique idea, that there is no need for a symbol at all. After all, the point of the symbol is to add distinction and uniqueness.

When the industrial design team creates a trademark for a company or a corporate identity symbol, it still must be said what the name of the company is. Therefore, the symbol has to be designed in conjunction with the name to form the logotype unit. Good taste demands a basic rule of design: When there is a high interest symbol such as the one for National Newark & Essex Bank or Royal Bank of Canada, for instance, then there should be a simple signature or logotype. *Be careful of combining a highly unique letter and unique symbol.*

Of course, the designer has control over uniqueness and distinctiveness, and it is up to the creative forces of the design team to combine uniqueness with an appropriate approach. To some extent, uniqueness is comparative. Yet the practical aspects of creativity are often overlooked. The design team must know what has been used and how. And, the industrial design firm, naturally, must have the facilities and knowledge to check out candidates for legal availability. But, perhaps most important, the design group must be able to recognize the possibilities for

novelty and freshness within each category: logotypes, initials, realistic design, abstract design.

While there is no meaningful generalities for making a unique identity possible, it is important to realize that the classic forms have the longer-lived values. Back in the Thirties there was a sudden upsurge of interest in the "amoeba" or free form, but this type of symbol is now dated.

Furthermore, it is hard to line up a free-form mark with words or blocks of copy because of its lack of symmetry. And a mark must above all be functional to be successful.

CLASSIC VALUES

How then can the designer be original or creative with classic forms? How can the designer modify or adjust them to be distinctive?

The answer may lie in recognition of an unusual sequence of letters in a logotype or an unusual combination of basic shapes or in an unusual arrangement or format. For instance, the U. S. Steel circular trademark is formed out of classic letter forms in a classic circle. However, the dropped middle S adds distinctiveness.

The Weyerhaeuser mark is a basic triangle, but use of the void inside to form a white tree shape and break the base for the trunk is departure enough to assure individuality and attention.

The heraldic device of the Royal Bank of Canada is rich with meaning and historic implication, yet it is a "combination" into a basic square shape, which tends to make it contemporary in feeling.

The new Group W identification for Westinghouse Broadcasting is based upon a highly legible letter form. The distinctive "W" is a dynamic letter design with certain abstract qualities, but one that still looks clearly like a "W". Basically, it is a Roman style "W" with the thin strokes deleted and the stylized serifs at the top joined to form an uninterrupted base for the word "Group". Reverse curves styled in the configuration add to the visual excitement.

Memorability is an outgrowth of these factors: distinctiveness, simplicity and appropriateness. Creativity is the means for achieving this goal.

LIPPINCOTT & MARGULIES INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS & MARKETING CONSULTANTS

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DESIGN SENSE #28 Corporate Endorsement
Is The Corporate Image Obsolete?

DESIGN SENSE #29 Where and Why Women Shop
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